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ABSTRACT

The discussion in this paper resulted from a questionnaire administered to students at a graduate seminar on Competency Based Teacher Education held at the University of Houston in 1973. The following topics are discussed: (a) the role of CBTE in society; (b) the nature of competencies; (c) individualizing and personalizing to meet student needs; (d) course objectives; (e) establishing performance levels; (f) modularization of instruction; (g) progression of students at self-determined rate; (h) utilization of varied instructional techniques; and (i) use of competency file. (JA)

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SOME ISSUES CONCERNING COMPETENCY BASED EDUCATION

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Educational philosophies have been a tempest of debate since the time of the Greeks. The schooling process represents the cultural transmitter for society. While fulfilling this role it has also been called upon to function as society's "change agent". This dichotomy of purpose has presented a basic conflict in educational philosophies. Educational trends have been frequent in birth and imbued with an almost religious fire. The most recent "cure" for the educational system has been the recently formulated Competency Based Teacher Education programs. The "bandwagon" for CBTE has been ladened with followers, while other educators question from the sidelines. During the summer of 1973, a graduate seminar in Competency Based Teacher Education held at the University of Houston involved students in discussions concerning CBTE. The class was composed of doctoral students and in-service teachers. Their experience within the field of education was diverse. The cultural make-up of the group was international in scope.

The openness and informal style with which the class was conducted encouraged every member of the group to freely express opinions (both pro and con) to the major issues involved which seem to plague the program. The fact that our instructor, Dr. Robert Houston, is a leader in the movement seemed to provoke thought about these issues, rather than blindly force acceptance of the CBTE philosophy. He encouraged critical thinking and was willing to listen to all points of view. The relaxed atmosphere and attitude which he created was truly a credit to a person in his position.

If any movement is to prevail it can only do so as long as its leaders are willing to remain open to challenge and realize that there is no one answer.

> The best reformers the world has ever seen
> are those who commence on themselves.
> -G. B. Shaw

A questionnaire formed the basis for the following discussion. The rhetoric was always lively and diversity of thought enabled many students to develop a more adequate conceptualization of Competency Based Teacher Education.

The Role of CBTE in Society

Business has always operated on a profit and loss basis. In dealing with products, profit represented success and loss

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was equated with failure. With stockholders clamoring for greater investment return, business began putting its policies on the grill as the annual corporate report was compiled. As industry strove for increased efficiency and expanded technology, education operated on a rather "hit and miss" basis. When society noticed that educational "misses" were producing illiteracy and higher dropout rates, there arose a clamor for educational accountability. Borrowing from the business world, the demand for accuracy in establishing specific goals and methods of evaluation, Competency Based Education was formulated. Society was no longer composed of uneducated masses to be closeted away from, but a viable force with which to contend.

Educational theorists such as Ivan Illich have proposed that what society really needs is a "deschooling process." The individual learner becomes the major focus in Illich's philosophy. Since society is indeed footing the bill for the vast educational system existing in this country, does it not have the right to be heard? Teachers trained in institutions of higher learning will eventually find their way to local schools thus exerting a grass roots influence on society. Some may perceive that society and its values are undergoing a metamorphosis of values. How are these teachers contending with the change in values? Is the change really taking place or are the indicators of change only representative of surface shifts?

If the individual needs are the focus of CBTE, what are the needs of the greater society outside? Although some of the participants regarded this as a primary issue relating to CBTE, I felt it represented a decision to be made philosophically.

If the societal needs can be clearly determined, it is equally true that the research needed to translate these into competencies is also available. The current teacher training cycle could be considered a closed society. Only by meeting the status quo criteria can a person hope to join the ranks of educators. Were alternative schools available would the profession extend to them the credibility currently afforded traditional institutions? If new avenues are not available education may be forced to plod along in mediocrity.

Competencies

One of the catch words of Competency Based Teacher Education has been the word "competencies." The question "who determines the competencies and "on what basis" varies according to the individual program. Just how much research has preceded the formulation of the competencies? Are these competencies subjected to periodic renewal? Can competencies be terminal in

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1973 retain their validity in 1978? Many of the competencies lie within the affective domain, can the possession of these competencies be accurately evaluated? Will an in-service teacher gain additional competencies or stagnate at a previous level? With population mobility, will a teacher certified as competent in a rural setting, also function competently in an urban environment?

Although specified teacher competencies is a much needed facet in the teacher training scheme, the majority of participants viewed the "how" and "why" of objective formation as paramount to any competency design. A structured program of competencies could be as fatal to education as the traditional programs lack of specified competencies.

When competencies are formulated in relation to specific groups, for instance Chicanos and Blacks, are Black and Chicano educators called upon to aid in the formation of these competencies? If competencies in community relations are being sought, are community people involved in determining the specifications for these competencies? Since experience is the best and most effective teacher, are in-service personnel sought out for additional input?

Can competencies effective with one group of students be adequate with a different group of students? All students are not alike. Should their teachers be trained in only one set of competencies? What of the student who relates best to traditional instructional styles?

Individualizing and Personalizing to Meet Student Needs

One of the advantages of the Competency Based programs over the Traditional program in teacher education has been their claim to individualize and personalize the instruction for students. Many of the participants felt that a claim such as this was a bit overstated in light of the reality with which the program was usually implemented. From what could be determined about existing CBTE programs, it appeared that the same set of instructional materials was given to each student. The only variables evident in such an approach was the time in which the student completed the packet, the possibility that he/she could pass the pretest and thus move on to other learning packets, and the built-in option for participating in alternative activities or self-devised activities within the module approach did not in effect represent solely the distribution of "paperback textbooks" in module form. In more highly developed traditional training programs, the participants felt that the same options as CBTE were also available. Did not traditional programs implemented by an interested faculty provide the same advantages as CBTE?

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Was the only real difference then the time factor and the opportunity to work as an individual rather than as a member of a class? The opposition to increased individual non-interactive work was strong among the participants. They felt that group interaction was a vital competency for teachers. Was the trend towards individualization going to produce teachers who lack basic skills in social interaction?

In implementing individualization from a student standpoint, was the faculty becoming more limited in the realm of academic freedom? When given a module for his class, was the staff member allowed to include material he personally felt was important?

While some faculty personnel opt for forming one-to-one relationships with students, others appear more interested in development of materials. Are staff members given an option as to which facet of the program they prefer to become involved in or do the students suffer as a result of being taught by someone who sees himself in only one role?

Objectives

Most capable instructors have fairly well defined objectives for their courses of instruction. Admittedly, these objectives are usually not made available to the students in advance, nor are they stated in behavioral terms. But how credible are the objectives formulated in CBTE? Who determines them? If they are formulated to fit the needs of the individual student, how can they be mapped out in advance of a professor meeting a class? Do objectives tend to lock in both student and staff rather than expanding the parameters in which they operate? Instead of the sacred air which now surrounds objectives, perhaps they should be looked on as guidelines to govern part of the course structure. Students and instructors would then have the freedom to devise objectives which would more accurately meet their needs.

Cognitive objectives take precedent over performance objectives in a traditional program. With the shift towards increased performance objectives, is the cognitive basis being neglected? Are CBTE students thoroughly equipped with a cognitive framework to assist them in meeting the performance objectives?

Individuals vary greatly in their ability to operate within learning models. Has enough research been conducted to determine the type of student who best operates in a CBTE context? After completion of a CBTE program, how successful is the teacher professionally? Is CBTE producing a different type of teacher? Do we now have a "new model" stripped of the defects of a previous model and equipped with modern "hardware?"

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Establishing Performance Levels

If a student finds that he/she is having difficulty with a particular learning packet, is it feasible to retain him/her at that level or should he/she be allowed to progress to another level and return to the former level at a later date? Some skill mastery is sequential, but in many areas learning is not necessarily dependent on previous steps.

Instruction Is Modularized

Modules which seek in effect to extend individualization in instruction often result in depersonalization. The amount of time required to develop a module is often so extensive that an instructor is left with less time to help the students having difficulty with modular instruction. In many circles, the time for development often outweighs the instructional mileage of the effort. How many learning options are really open to the student? Or is he/she passing through a "mill-type" instruction at his/her own rate. Is it realistic to devote so many hours to developing a module for one group of students and then be faced with extensive revisions for the next group?

Modular instruction on an individualized basis requires more personnel. Universities and colleges currently strapped for funds are unable to employ additional staff members for effective program implementation. Is it feasible to expect one faculty member operating in the usual 24 hour a day time span to realistically meet the needs of twenty individual students?

Considering the expense involved in developing slide/tapes to accompany modules, are the universities fiscally prepared to make an extensive financial commitment to a Competency Based Teacher Education program?

Student Progress at Self Determined Rate

Adults as well as children usually pass through "plateaus and valleys" of learning rates. Idealistically, a student, regardless of his chronological age, would learn more effectively if allowed to progress according to his own internal learning clock. Realistically, what are the implications for the self-paced procedure? Would some students then work so quickly that they achieve only a surface representation of minimum competencies? Would others progress so slowly that their program could conceivably span a ten-year period? If a student is certified as competent in 1973, is it reasonable to believe that at the termination of the program (the timing of which is undetermined) he/she would still be competent? Most of the participants opposed allowing students complete authority in gauging the

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Many campuses are privileged to have their own television stations. Are these extra facilities sufficiently involved in devising audio-visual techniques for inclusion in learning packets?

Use of Competency File

In many institutions CBTE programs are operating on an experimental basis parallel to traditional teacher training programs. Grades of pass/fail in CBTE are translated to the regular grading scale. In some instances a pass is calculated as an A. Students involved in the regular program often resent this approach. The C earned by the regular program student may in essence be equivalent to the translated A of CBTE.

Since accumulated course credits are included in the regular students profile, how does the CBTE program equate these courses to modular completion?

Were the institutions to adopt a grading format to accommodate both types of programs the problem of composite student profiles would be solved.

Conclusion

> My interest is in the future because I am going to spend the rest of my life there.
>
> C. Kettering

Although it may appear from the previous discussion that the participants were unreceptive to the Competency Based Teacher Education program this was not the case. The participants viewed CBTE as a possible answer, but one that needs philosophical exploration and extended research before blind acceptance.

> Where all think alike, no one thinks very much.
>
> W. Lippmann

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length of time for program completion. Perhaps it would be best to allow the student to set up a time chart for his own program, as the program progressed, the student in conference with his advisor, could periodically readjust the chart. The advisor should assist the student in delineating reasonable time limits. Since the advisor has worked with other students during the same program he/she has conceptualized the approximate time needed for that type of student in relation to the learning taking place. Although the question of extended time for program completion occupied the majority of the time spent on this question, other participants who had experienced so-called competency based courses, queried the rationale behind the equation--less time spent on work equals lower quality of work. Is it within the realm of the competency based philosophy to dock a student's grade because, "...he did not spend as much time on his projects as others did." Is the instructor so "time-locked" that he cannot admit that some students can produce extremely high quality work in three hours, whereas, less gifted individuals must slave for hours to produce work of equivalent quality?

One of the participants had helped in the development of competency based modules in science education. He commented that when a student came to him for the post-assessment only weeks after receiving a module designed to last an entire semester, he felt that perhaps the module was inadequate and not enough work had been included. Are professors so insecure that an excellent student presents more of a threat than an opportunity to further develop the intellectual abilities of a fellow human being?

Utilization of Varied Instructional Techniques

Just how much variety exists in training materials? Audio-visual, printed matter, and field experiences were the three main approaches utilized by traditional programs. Are these not the same techniques employed by CBTE? Isn't the basic question then one of quality and appropriateness of materials to the learning situation? Perhaps the competency based approach utilizes more effectively the wide range of materials available. Undergraduate students have usually determined the mode by which they learn most effectively. CBTE affords them the opportunity to select the method best suited to their needs. In most cases a student is offered a variety of means to receive the cognitive data. This can be either a film, attending a lecture, printed matter, or slide/tapes presentations. Utilization of audio-visual materials for the sake of audio-visual materials is a possible pitfall for CBTE. The tendency might be to "grab" anything audio-visual and use it without first screening the quality. Could newly devised slide/tapes become obsolete resulting in a modern day version of the professor's sheave of yellowed lecture notes?